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Let's Talk EXTENSION NUTRITION

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U. S. Department of Agriculture ■ Washington, 25, D. C.

Report of Progress to National 4-H Foods and Nutrition Program Development Committee*

Are we improving our 4-H foods and nutrition projects so they better meet the needs of young people today? Two years ago when I worked with this group I brought up the question for your consideration of how we could get States to consider whether their 4-H program was built on needs, interests, and abilities of boys and girls. Today I would like to bring you some evidences of progress.

During the last 2 years I have contacted the nutrition specialists in 37 States and discussed this problem with them. In 22 or about half the States in the United States, we have gone a step further and discussed the problem jointly with members of the State 4-H Club staff and the nutrition specialists. Twenty of the States have in addition to this called a committee to meet together to consider adapting their 4-H foods and nutrition program to the age, abilities, and interests of the members. They are also considering whether their recipes and methods are up to date.

What was the composition of these committees? Of course, it varied from State to State. The committee was usually made up of the nutritionists and the State 4-H Club agents. In addition, half of these committees included home demonstration or county 4-H agents. One third of the committees brought in local adult leaders and a few brought in junior leaders and members. In some States, other State extension personnel were included such as the State home demonstration leader, District home demonstration supervisor, and other specialists such as gardening, home management, family life, marketing, and clothing.

The committees served different purposes in different States. Some were State committees whose object was to take a look at the State program and make plans. Some were exploratory groups to see what needed to be done. Some were county committees in States that preferred to try out ideas on a limited scale, but all served a very good purpose. Instead of a nutrition specialist or a 4-H Club agent sitting in her office and writing 4-H Club projects without help, she has the advice of a group who is thinking about the problem. If she needs to know more about the interests of the boys and girls of a cer-

* Talk made to National 4-H Foods and Nutrition Program Development Committee, June 14, 1956, Washington, D. C., by Evelyn L. Blanchard, Extension Nutritionist.

tain age, they can help her find it. They can aid in field testing the project after it has been written. They can get suggestions from members and leaders and help with evaluation. A project built by involving others has their interest and support--in this case of the 4-H Club members and local leaders as well as the professional staff.

Let's look at an exploratory committee. A home demonstration agent or 4-H agent calls a group of local leaders together to discuss with them what they think are the good points as well as the weak points with their present 4-H Club program. To help the leaders with their thinking, it is often necessary to give the leaders a broader vision of what a good 4-H foods program can be or they will be limited by their experiences. They may consider the trends in foods and nutrition. For example, should you teach the young members how to make a cake using a commercial mix when that is the way their mothers make cake? They need to consider the interests of young people but to adapt the projects so they meet their needs and abilities as well as interests. Younger members are interested in learning how to make individual dishes. Older members are interested in learning how to entertain.

If your State feels the need for making your projects better to meet the needs of the youth, what steps do you go through to get the job done? There are many ways of approaching the problem but it must go through about the same steps. What are these steps?

1. Needs for Improving Program

Usually the local Club leaders, the agent, the specialist, or the 4-H Club staff recognize that it is desirable to improve the 4-H Club program.

2. Situation

A committee made up of 4-H Club staff, nutrition specialist, and usually county staff members meets and considers what of their present program needs improving and what should be retained.

3. Questionnaire

In reviewing the situation the committee may find they do not have all the information they need about food patterns in their State, or about the interests of the youth, so they decide to use a questionnaire to get some information. The questionnaire has another value also--that is in getting the local leaders, the members, and the county staff involved in improving the 4-H foods program.

4. Plan the Program

After the information is gathered together the foods and nutrition program should be broken down into units or projects that fit the various developmental stages of the members. It should increase in difficulty to meet the increased abilities of different ages. It should include the important information we hope to teach in foods and nutrition. After this has been planned it is necessary to decide which of the projects should be prepared first. Some States start with the beginning projects and others feel the need is greater to improve the material given the older Club member. Since it is impossible to

write an entire program at one time, having a good plan that fits together is very important. Otherwise the program just grows like "Topsy."

5. Prepare the Project

The projects or units are usually worked out by the nutrition specialist using the advice of the committee. All recipes should be carefully tested, should be up to date in method, and should be a food the members will enjoy making and eating.

6. Fieldtest

After a project or unit is prepared it is much better to mimeograph it and try it in a few counties who are interested in helping with the fieldtest.

7. Analysis

An analysis is made of the fieldtest. Various methods may be used such as questionnaires, observations, informal discussions with members and leaders. The important thing to remember is that you must get the members' opinions on this. Leaders' opinions do not necessarily agree with those of the members.

8. Revision

After the analysis has been made it is revised, incorporating such suggestions as are applicable, taking into consideration suggestions made by the members, leaders, and agents as well as the nutrition specialist and 4-H Club staff.

9. Program Action

The projects or units are now ready to be printed or mimeographed for use by the entire State. It is best if it can be introduced at agents' conference so all the counties will understand what has been done. It is well to keep the agents informed of the progress throughout all the steps so they can make their suggestions and are in agreement with the progress.

10. Evaluation

After the project has been used several years it should be evaluated to see if it is still meeting the needs. Some States plan to review a certain number of projects every 5 years. If, for example, each year you systematically review two projects then the specialist can revise them if necessary without the job being so huge she is not able to keep up with it. The next year she can review two more projects, etc.

The support this committee is giving certainly is helpful in bringing about the progress which is being made in strengthening the 4-H foods and nutrition program



